

# Chapter Thirty-One

## THE JEWS IN THE REVOLUTION

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### Tsarist Policy and the 'Jewish Problem'

Until the 1770s, Russia's rulers excluded Jews from their lands; with the Polish partitions, though, the empire absorbed territories inhabited by over 500,000 Jews.<sup>1</sup> In addressing 'the Jewish problem,' Tsarist officials combined religious antipathy with the Enlightenment prejudice that Jewish culture promoted separatism and economic exploitation. Assumptions that Jews could not be integrated into the imperial order unless 'normalized' shaped Tsarist policies that promoted segregation and assimilation. Russian law designated Jews as urban commoners, yet treated them as a special class and restricted them to western provinces that became known as the Pale of Settlement.<sup>2</sup> Initially the state intervened minimally in Jewish affairs, which it left to communal self-government institutions (*kehillot*) with limited autonomy. From the mid-1820s, however, it pursued assimilation through means that included military conscription, secular state Jewish schools, and replacement of *kehillot* with state-supervised communal associations (*obshchiny*; singular, *obshchina*) under state-appointed rabbis. Few Jews assimilated, but this threat bridged differences between Hasidic and non-Hasidic (Mitnagdic) Orthodox traditionalists. A small but influential cohort of acculturated *maskilim* – proponents of the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) – did embrace assimilation, which they believed would end Jewish legal disabilities.

The limits to reform in the 1860s and new Tsarist policies after the March 1881 assassination of Alexander II crushed such hopes. Following anti-Jewish pogroms in 1881–1882, the government imposed new punitive restrictions. The first of these, the 1882 'May Laws,' banned Jews from purchasing land or settling in villages; later measures hardened the Pale's borders, expelled 'illegal' migrants from Russia's interior, imposed quotas on school and university enrollments,

and limited access to professional careers. State officials opposed pogroms but treated Jews as an alien element responsible for revolutionary contagion. Like emergent racialized antisemitic discourse, this reinforced religious hatreds and provided justification for pogroms during periods of social or economic instability. More than three hundred pogroms occurred between 1903 and the end of the 1905 Revolution, when Cossacks and local police sometimes joined in violence condoned by ultra-nationalist 'Black Hundreds.'

When in 1905 the Tsarist state acceded to constitutional reforms, it refused to grant Jews legal equality. Liberals in the State Dumas, which included some Jewish deputies, failed to pass legislation for Jewish equal rights (which Nicholas II would have rejected). In 1906–1914 legal disabilities deepened, as did official antisemitism. It was in this environment that Jewish political parties proliferated and secular Jewish public culture bloomed. (See Table 31.1.)

### Social and Economic Conditions to 1914

The 1897 census data counted 5.2 million Jews in the Russian Empire, 94 percent of whom lived in the Pale of Settlement. Jews stood out as urban and literate, yet only a small minority were wealthy businessmen or educated professionals. In the Pale, about 40 percent of Jewish income earners engaged in commerce, primarily as peddlers, middlemen, and shopkeepers – occupations that brought them into frequent contact with peasants. Another 40 percent worked in factories and workshops or as day laborers or domestic servants, usually for Jewish employers. Structural economic change and extraordinary population growth created mass unemployment among the Pale's Jews, most of whom lived at the margins of poverty. Between 1880 and 1914, some

**Table 31.1** Jewish political parties and associations generally aligned with liberals in 1917

<i>Orthodox Religious Parties</i>	<i>Secular Non-Zionist Parties</i>	<i>Secular Zionist Parties</i>
Agudat Israel (Unity of Israel), a non-Zionist party	Jewish Democratic Group, aligned with the Trudoviks	Russian Zionist Organization (General Zionists)
Agudat (Unity), a coalition led by Agudat Israel	Jewish National Group, aligned with the Kadets	
Mizrachi, a Zionist party	Jewish National Party (Folkspartei)	
Tradition and Freedom, a coalition led by Mizrachi		

two million emigrated from Russia. Within the Pale, hundreds of thousands sought economic opportunity by migrating from shtetls to cities or to the less-densely populated southwestern and southern provinces. The tentative status of immigrants in the empire's interior was illustrated by mass expulsion of Moscow's Jewish artisans in 1891.

Most Jews remained religiously Orthodox and Yiddish speaking, but social and economic change had destabilized traditional Jewish life. A vibrant secular, multi-lingual Jewish public culture emerged, largely concerned with the meanings of Jewish nationhood. Jewish daily life both reinforced national identity and undercut ethno-religious solidarity: anti-Semitism, legal discrimination, and the threat of pogroms strengthened Jewish identity, but workplace conflict and communal life engendered powerful class and generational tensions. Jewish workers, artisans, clerks, and students often formed the labor movement's vanguard, particularly in 1905 (although Russian socialists downplayed their contributions).

### Jews and Politics to 1914

As in Old Regime Europe, in Tsarist Russia Jewish communities addressed the government through privileged elite intercessors (*shtadlanim*). *Maskilim* also sought to influence Tsarist state policy: some endorsed assimilation, but most believed Jews could gain civic equality while retaining their faith if they became acculturated and economically productive. When the Great Reforms failed to liberalize Jewish policy and the state implemented new restrictions, politically engaged Jews embraced Jewish nationalism. Many believed that Jews must be productivized and culturally revitalized to correct 'abnormal' national development in the Diaspora. Many also gravitated toward the liberal or socialist Russian oppositionist movements.

The leadership and general ranks of major Russian socialist parties included disproportionately large numbers of Jews. Jews among the Menshevik and Bolshevik factional leaders in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) included Iulii Martov (Tsederbaum), Leon Trotsky (Bronstein), and Lev Kamenev (Rozenfel'd). Jewish leaders in the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (PSR)

included Khaim Zhitlovskii, Evno Azev, and Isaac Shteinberg.<sup>3</sup> Jewish Mensheviks and SRs often joined cognate Jewish parties, while most Jewish Bolsheviks were assimilationists alienated from Jewish affairs.

Jewish socialists in Russia usually joined Jewish parties with transnational organizations. The oldest and largest, the Bund (the General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia), was founded in 1897. Its Marxist program anticipated that of the RSDLP, but the Bund's focus on Jewish proletarians and its position on Jewish autonomy led to a break with the RSDLP in 1903 (concurrent with the Bolshevik–Menshevik split). The Bund's study circles, union activism, and cooperative society work garnered it broad support among Jewish workers and students. In 1905–1906 Bundists were among the revolutionary movement's most active elements and formed self-defense units to combat pogrom violence. In 1906, the Bund rejoined the RSDLP and allied with the Mensheviks; through 1914, its cells remained the movement's best-organized element.

Russian liberalism attracted acculturated professionals who, like Maksim Vinaver – a leader in the Liberation Movement and the Party of People's Freedom (Kadets) – believed political reform could normalize Jewish life. An allied Jewish liberal movement campaigned for Jewish equal rights. Like the Russian movement, it split into rival parties after the 1905 October Manifesto: the Jewish National Group aligned with the Kadets, the Jewish Democratic Group with the quasi-populist Trudoviks. To counter secular liberal and socialist influence, in 1912 a group of Orthodox clerics founded the transnational religious party Agudat Israel (Unity of Israel), which had a small Russian organization.

In the Russian Empire, Jewish nationalism took two complex forms: autonomism, which envisioned extraterritorial autonomous Jewish institutions; and Zionism, which called for a Jewish territorial state. As advocated by Simon Dubnov and the Jewish National Party (Folkspartei), autonomism rejected the idea of a separate Jewish state and instead proposed that autonomous secular *kehillot* could revitalize Jewish national culture in a democratic Russia. In the Bund's Marxist version of autonomism, Jews could chose to associate through autonomous cultural institutions using the language of the Jewish proletariat, Yiddish.

The Russian Empire in the late nineteenth century had been an incubator for Zionist conceptions of Jewish nationalism. Until late 1906, the empire's largest Zionist association, the Russian Zionist Organization (the General Zionists), refrained from direct engagement in Russian domestic politics and defined itself as a politically neutral movement in accord with principles of the World Zionist Organization (established in 1897). Russia's first Zionist political party, the Mizrahi, founded in 1902, defined the Jewish nation in religious terms and called for an Orthodox Jewish state in Palestine. In contrast, the General Zionists defined nationhood in secular terms. The General Zionists abandoned their stance of political neutrality at the 1906 Third All-Russian Conference of Zionist Organizations in Helsinki. From that point, the organization advocated parliamentary democracy and universal civil rights in the Russian Empire as well as creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. In addition to endorsing Jewish political action in pursuit of rights in Russia, the General Zionists adopted an essentially autonomist position: like the Folkspartei, it proposed autonomous *kehillot* to revitalize Russian Jewish national culture. In 1907 the Tsarist government declared the movement illegal, after which Zionists (like socialists) functioned through underground cells.

The left wing of the Zionist movement included both populist socialist organizations like the scouts group Tseire Tsion (Youth of Zion), and Marxist elements like the Jewish Social Democratic Labor Party Poalei Tsion (Workers of Zion), founded in 1906. Both endorsed the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. A separate leftist variant of Zionism, territorialism, envisioned Jewish political autonomy outside Palestine, as part of a multi-national federated state. This position was championed by the Zionist Socialist Labor Party (SS), a Marxist party founded in 1905. The Jewish Socialist Labor Party (SERP), founded in 1906, offered a more abstract version of territorialism. SERP's socialism was strongly influenced by Marxism, but personal connections and a populist conception of class led the party to ally with the PSR. Its program called for extraterritorial Yiddish-language self-government institutions and a Jewish national council (*Seim*) in a democratic Russian federated republic, and left a Jewish national territory a matter for future elaboration.

### The Great War and the End of the Pale

When the Great War began, liberal Jews joined Russia's patriotic fervor and hoped Jewish loyalty would lead to civic equality. Some half-million Jews served in Russia's wartime army, and the Russian-language Jewish press publicized their heroism in hope this would counter anti-Jewish stereotypes. In Russia's political and popular culture, however, Jews were depicted as aliens sympathetic to the Germans, suspect as shirkers, deserters, speculators, and spies.

Early in the war, Russian commanders in Poland and Galicia began taking hostages to induce Jewish cooperation and brutally deported Jews from front zones toward the Pale's eastern borders. As the Central Powers advanced, they occupied Pale territories holding nearly 40 percent of the Russian Empire's Jewish population. As Russia's army fell back, its soldiers led civilians in looting, beating, and raping Jews. Deadly pogroms occurred across the front zone in 1915. By late that summer, the army had deported over 600,000 Jews to the eastern edge of the Pale, creating a refugee crisis. State Duma liberals denounced these policies and proposed abolishing the Pale. In August 1915, pressure from Russia's allies and its own command staff led the Tsar's Council of Ministers to enact 'temporary measures' that opened the interior, but still banned Jews from villages, the capital cities, the Caucasus, and Cossack lands.

Jewish families in the interior shared hardships the war imposed on Russia's population: they lost sons to conscription, struggled with food shortages, and watched inflation erode their real wages. Nonetheless provincial officials (like some government ministers) suspected Jews as spies and accused them of sabotaging the war economy through speculation, disruption of the grain trade, and hoarding of currency – accusations widely accepted in popular culture. In 1915 censors shut down most Jewish newspapers and banned publication in Yiddish and Hebrew. Jews faced heightened surveillance, harassment, and arrest by police who blamed them for anti-war and revolutionary agitation. In 1916 repeated attempts to propose Jewish legal equality in the State Duma failed.

### Jewish Relief Work and Political Activity

Jewish communal and business leaders quickly realized the need to organize aid for families affected by the war. In August 1914, business leaders in Petrograd formed a Committee to Aid Jewish War Victims (EKOPO). In conjunction with established charitable societies for Protection of Jewish Health (OZE), Promotion of Skilled Trades (ORT), and Promotion of Culture Jewish Enlightenment (OPE), EKOPO assembled a network of local refugee relief committees that operated hundreds of clinics, schools, canteens, and labor exchanges. These worked in conjunction with the Union of Zemstvos and Towns and received financial aid from the American Joint Distribution Committee. Though wary of such public associations, Tsarist officials saw their utility in mobilizing wartime public resources.

By expanding legal associational activity, relief work opened a new field for political activity, which continued despite heightened censorship and surveillance. The General Zionists used relief work in the interior to establish new footholds among refugees and build activist networks. The war had initially disrupted networks among the socialists, who in 1914–1915 criticized the relief agencies as undemocratic

‘bourgeois’ organizations (much as they had criticized the OZE, ORT, and OPE before the war). By 1916, though, socialists in many locales had joined in relief work, which provided them contact with refugees and legal opportunities for public agitation. In many locales, Jewish workers mobilized by the socialists led the wartime labor movement. Like the Russian parties, Jewish socialists split into internationalists who condemned the imperialist war and defensists opposed to German militarism. Most Bundists and Poalei-Tsionists endorsed the 1915 Zimmerwald program for peace without annexations or indemnities. When the Tsarist regime fell in March 1917, many became ‘revolutionary defensists.’

**The February Revolution and Jewish Politics**

In March 1917 Jewish communities greeted creation of the Provisional Government, which on March 20 abolished legal disabilities based on religion and nationality. While few Jews held illusions that antisemitism would disappear, most expected that civic equality would improve their lot. Liberals, General Zionists, and religious parties firmly supported the new government; socialist parties did so conditionally, in accord with the Petrograd Soviet’s position. The government’s initial leadership included no Jews and only a few served in ministerial or sub-ministerial posts in its four iterations. Locally, though, representatives of Jewish parties and organizations entered democratized public executive committees, and Jewish socialist party members joined workers’ and soldiers’ soviets. Hundreds more Jews participated in local government and soviet institutions as members of Russian parties, unions, and other organizations.<sup>4</sup> All told, Jews constituted as much as 10 percent of the revolutionary political leadership in 1917. Yet despite the vigor with which some participated in the Russian and Jewish political spheres, most Jews remained cautiously distant

from politics, even as they found themselves swept along in waves of revolutionary change. (See Table 31.2.)

In spring 1917 Jewish parties modified their programs in response to the new political environment. The Bund espoused anti-Zionist Yiddishist cultural nationalism while stressing Jewish workers’ common cause with the Russian proletariat in class struggle toward a socialist future. An April Bund congress in Petrograd proposed democratic elections for secular communal cultural institutions and integration of Yiddish-language schools into a reformed state school network. On most tactical matters (e.g., support for government coalitions) the Bund aligned with the Mensheviks, which magnified its influence. Many Bundists belonged to Menshevik organizations (particularly in internationalist factions). Poale-Tsion also aligned with the internationalist Mensheviks, though its Zionism set it in opposition to the Bund.

In early summer 1917 the SS and SERP merged to form the United Jewish Socialist Workers’ Party (OESRP). The OESRP platform championed Marxist-inflected populism, endorsed Yiddish as the Jewish national language, and enunciated a vision of extraterritorial autonomism in which democratically elected councils would administer Jewish institutions in a federated Russian republic that included Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> The OESRP allied with the PSR’s revolutionary defensist majority, and many activists belonged to both parties. OESRP influence was greatest in Ukraine, and it located its headquarters in Kiev.

After the February Revolution the General Zionists emerged as Russia’s largest Jewish party. Whereas Bund membership peaked at 35,000, the General Zionists had 140,000 members in May and over 300,000 by December. In May, delegates from three hundred locales attended the Seventh All-Russian Zionist Congress, which called for international recognition of Palestine as the Jewish national homeland and made discussion of Palestine a prerequisite for Zionist participation in a proposed Jewish national congress. At the same time, the congress endorsed creation of a hierarchy of Jewish autonomous institutions in Russia. To revitalize Jewish national culture in Russia, it demanded that reorganized *kehillot* use Hebrew as the Jewish national language in all institutional activities, including all schools and charities.

Other Zionist groups also thrived in Russia’s new democratic environment. On the left, Poalei-Tsion held its first legal Russian conference in Moscow in early April; by summer it had over 15,000 members and dozens of new local committees. A May Tseire Tsion conference in Moscow represented nearly 26,000 members, whom it urged to prepare for the work of building a socialist Palestine. Among the religious Zionists, in April the Mizrachi joined with several other Jewish religious parties in a movement called Tradition and Freedom. In early summer, Agudas Israel coordinated a similar movement called Agudat (Unity). Like other nominally center-right groups these parties actually endorsed

**Table 31.2** Jewish socialist political parties in 1917

<i>Marxist Labor Parties</i>	<i>Parties Affiliated with the PSR</i>
The Bund (General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia), aligned with the Mensheviks	Jewish Socialist Labor Party (SERP, also known as Seimists), aligned with the PSR
Poale-Tsion (Workers of Zion; the Jewish Social Democratic Labor Party Poale-Tsion), aligned with the left Mensheviks	United Jewish Socialist Workers Party (OESRP, the Fareynikte), merger of the Zionist Socialist Party and the Jewish Socialist Labor Party
Tseire Tsion (Youth of Zion): Zionist-socialist youth party	
Zionist Socialist Party (SS)	

liberal and left-liberal social programs. Their programs also had autonomist elements. Freedom and Tradition called for legal recognition of the Jewish Sabbath, endorsed democratic reorganization of government-funded *kehillot*, and supported creation of autonomous national cultural institutions and convocation of a Jewish national congress. Agudat's similar program also endorsed workers' rights and land redistribution. Such positions eased cooperation between the religious parties, the General Zionists, and Jewish liberals.

In 1917 Jewish liberal groups' influence far exceed their membership. Figures from the left-liberal Jewish People's Group entered the Trudovik and People's Socialist party leadership. The Jewish National Group remained allied with the Kadets, and like that party opposed national political autonomy as weakening the Russian state. It did, however, endorse cultural autonomy, the use of Hebrew *and* Yiddish in Jewish schools, and creation of an all-Russian communal organization. Despite the liberals' secularist orientation, they favored religious instruction in communal schools and proposed recognition of Yiddish as a state language wherever Jews constituted at least 20 percent of the population. The Folkspartei, which advocated autonomous, democratized *kehillot* and cultural institutions to revitalize national culture, led calls for a Jewish national congress in 1917.

In spring 1917 all Jewish parties endorsed convocation of a democratically elected Jewish national congress, just as all supported *kehillot* democratization. In July a preliminary All-Russian Jewish Conference, with elected delegates and party representatives from thirteen cities and members of each party's leadership, met in Petrograd to plan the congress. Bundists sought to limit the congress to topics concerning Russia, but eventually agreed that it would discuss Palestine and Jews' fate elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Regarding Russia, the congress would draft plans for democratized *kehillot* and autonomous Jewish national institutions and formulate a proposal on protection of national minority rights for submission to the Russian Constituent Assembly.

Class as well as national identity shaped popular Jewish politics in 1917. In spring Jewish workers led demands for the eight-hour workday and wage raises in many cities. Jewish factory workers and artisans, but also clerks and some white-collar employees, unionized and identified with the workers' movement, as did many student groups. Many artisans supported religious parties whose platforms included provisions on workers' rights, and each socialist party claimed to best represent Jewish working-class interests and depicted the non-socialists as 'bourgeois.' But inter-party competition among the socialists focused on national identity issues. The anti-Zionist Bund, the Palestinophile Poale-Tsion, and the extraterritorialist OESRP clashed over forms of political autonomy, while debates over language put the Bund and OESRP in the Yiddish camp and the Zionists (including socialists) in the Hebrew camp. (See Table 31.3.)

### Culture Enlightenment and Jewish Politics in 1917

'Cultural enlightenment,' like 'democratization,' was central to revolutionary expectations and became a constant theme in the Jewish press that proliferated in 1917. Cultural activists agreed that culture was an essential extra-political aspect of nation building, but the gulf between Hebraists and Yiddishists deepened and became increasingly politicized. In spring, a Hebraist meeting in Moscow organized a pan-Russian *Tarbut* (Culture) society, which established dozens of Hebrew language schools, courses, and cultural activities. In late 1917 a parallel pan-Russian Yiddish culture association, the Kultur-Lige, was founded in Kiev. At the local level, anti-Zionists often disrupted Hebrew cultural events, just as Zionists frequently disrupted Yiddish events.

Jewish cultural and educational initiatives found enthusiastic audiences across revolutionary Russia. Jewish public libraries and various party, workers', and youth clubs offered courses on Jewish history and literature that were exceptionally popular, as were Yiddish theater and musical events

**Table 31.3** Jewish non-Zionist, Zionist-Palestinophile, and Extraterritorialist Parties in 1917

<i>Non-Zionist</i>	<i>Zionist-Palestinophile</i>	<i>Extraterritorialist</i>
Agudat Israel (Unity of Israel), Orthodox religious party	Mizrachi, Orthodox religious party	Jewish Socialist Labor Party (SERP, also known as Seimists)
Agudat (Unity), Orthodox coalition led by Agudat Israel	Tradition and Freedom, Orthodox coalition led by Mizrachi	United Jewish Socialist Workers Party (OESRP, the Fareynikte), merger of the Zionist Socialist Party and the Jewish Socialist Labor Party
Jewish Democratic Group	Poale-Tsion (Jewish Social Democratic Labor Party Poale-Tsion)	
Jewish National Group	Tseire Tsion (Youth of Zion)	
Jewish National Party (Folkspartei)	Zionist Socialist Party (SS)	
The Bund (General Union of Jewish Workers)	Russian Zionist Organization (General Zionists)	

and Jewish-themed films. Jewish religious and secular schools flourished and enrollments bourgeoned despite war-related shortages and other impediments. Jewish teachers and students joined with parents in new local school associations and held regional and national schools conferences.

### Local Jewish Politics in 1917

In spring, local Jewish party groups quickly formed or were reinvigorated across the rump empire. Non-socialist groups organized united assemblies of Jewish organizations in many cities. Socialists sometimes joined these, but often refused to cooperate with 'bourgeois' organizations. All parties organized clubs, night courses, youth circles, and cultural programs to mobilize support. Public meetings – including women's events – became a feature of daily life. Non-socialists framed these in supra-class terms as uniting all Jews, while socialists appealed to worker identity. Although local socialist politics featured intense inter-party rivalry, factions often worked together in the soviets, union and workers' cooperatives.

Elections for municipal dumas, reorganized *kehillot*, the Constituent Assembly, and the All-Russian Jewish Congress all were focal points of local Jewish politics in 1917. The first of these, the early summer's дума elections, marked the peak of Jewish moderate socialist influence. Non-socialist campaign appeals emphasized supra-class unity as a guarantee of Jews' legal and cultural rights and endorsed Kadet and Trudovik municipal reform proposals. The Jewish socialists also highlighted defense of rights and culture, but framed in class terms, and endorsed Menshevik and SR municipal platforms. Multi-party electoral blocs make teasing out the Jewish vote difficult. Jewish liberals often joined the Kadet ticket, Bundists ran with Mensheviks, and the OESRP with the PSR. In several cities, all Russian and Jewish socialist factions joined a single electoral bloc. Poalei-Tsion and OESRP formed a separate Jewish socialist bloc in some cities, but ran their own tickets in others. General Zionists, liberals, and religious parties formed 'national,' 'democratic,' or 'non-party' blocs, although the Folkspartei and General Zionists often ran alone. The socialists' participation in blocs gave them considerably more дума seats than the non-socialists, and in some cities they garnered a clear majority of Jewish votes. In the Bundist stronghold of Minsk, though, the Jewish National Bloc won 16 дума seats while the socialists combined only 12, including 10 for the Bund.

From mid-summer, the decline of Jewish socialist parties paralleled that of the Mensheviks and centrist SRs. As the socialist 'center' eroded, few Jews shifted left toward the Bolsheviks, who had opposed Jewish autonomism. (Relatively more joined the Anarchists and left SRs.) And as resurgent antisemitism and violence cast greater doubt on the possibility of building a new future in Russia, support for the General Zionists broadened.

### Resurgent Antisemitism and the Threat of Anarchy

The revolution did not end antisemitism, suspicion of Jews as shirkers and speculators, 'patriotic' association of Jews with enemy forces, or the danger of pogroms. Rumors of Jewish speculation, widespread in Petrograd during the February uprising, proliferated as shortages of food and necessities worsened. Liberal and socialist newspapers eschewed anti-Jewish rhetoric as uncivilized and rarely noted the ethnicity of Jews prominent in the party and soviet leaderships. The sensationalist boulevard press, though, depicted Jews as 'dark forces' and played into conspiratorial fear of internal enemies. Delegitimizing rumors depicted political figures as Jews even when they were not, as in the case of Alexander Kerensky. Moreover, conflation of Jews with *burzhui* (the bourgeois enemy), while not universal, was common among workers and soldiers, a corollary of hegemonic revolutionary class discourse.

The Provisional Government had recognized Jewish equality just before the Passover holiday, as rumors spread that Jews were hoarding flour to make Passover matzo. In some locales, crowds forcibly 'requisitioned' flour from Jewish stores and cooperatives. In spring 1917 Jews suffered disproportionately from violent crime, especially at the hands of garrison soldiers, but rarely faced group violence. As economic and political disorder escalated, though, so did anti-Jewish rumors and violence. Antisemitic agitation in the army (often attributed to Bolshevik activists) was common during the crisis over the first coalition government's June military offense, after which soldiers' violence against individual Jews and pogrom threats increased. As summer deepened, peasant attacks on and seizure of Jewish owned or rented agricultural property became more frequent. During and after the July political crisis, reports of anti-semitic leaflets and attempts to incite pogroms were common in cities, as were accounts of violence against individual Jews. From August through the fall, rumors of hoarding and speculation spawned bread and goods riots featuring attacks on Jews, often with soldiers' participation.

The socialist and liberal press attributed such violence to underdeveloped political consciousness that purportedly had left the masses vulnerable to bolshevist and monarchist agitation. Speakers at the mid-August Moscow State Conference described anti-Jewish violence as a manifestation of spiraling anarchy that threatened the revolution. Among Jews, the Kornilov crisis and instability of Kerensky's Directory and third coalition government reinforced fear that anarchy would bring more anti-Jewish violence.

### Jewish Politics in October–December 1917

Jews lost positions in local soviets as Bolshevik, left SRs, and Anarchist majority blocs displaced the moderate socialists in fall 1917. The Jewish socialist parties rejected the maximalists' calls for insurrection, but the equation of Jews with

Bolshevism had reached such a point that an October 20 editorial in the liberal *Moscow News* (*Moskovskaia Vedomosti*) described Bolshevik leaders as ‘the dregs of Jewry.’ It listed Jewish names of ‘Bolsheviks’ who used Russian pseudonyms, including the left Menshevik Iulii Martov. On October 25 Martov was among the many Jews who, in the name of Russian and Jewish socialist parties, denounced the Bolshevik coup at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets. All Jewish parties condemned Lenin’s coup, joined anti-Bolshevik protests, and looked to the Constituent Assembly to overturn the Bolsheviks.<sup>6</sup>

During November’s Constituent Assembly election campaign, all Jewish parties warned that Bolshevik rule threatened Jews’ civil equality. In provinces with large Jewish populations, non-socialists formed joint ‘national’ candidate slates, while the socialists generally ran single party tickets. Rather than offer their own candidates in provinces with small Jewish populations, the Bund joined Menshevik lists, the OESRP backed the PSR. In some locales, General Zionists endorsed the Trudoviks and Jewish liberals supported the Kadets. (In general, though, as Simon Rabinovich has shown, Kadet vacillation concerning protection of Jewish rights had frayed their relations with Jewish Liberals.) Absenteeism was high, and electoral blocs complicate generalizations about Jews’ electoral choices. Still, results illustrate a precipitous decline in socialist influence among politically engaged Jews. Of some 600,000 votes cast for Jewish party lists, no more than 15 percent went to the socialists. By comparison, 83 percent went to non-socialist national blocs of General Zionists, religious parties, and Jewish liberals (often including the Folkspartei).

*Kehillot* elections that same month suggest that the General Zionists drew voters to the national blocs.<sup>7</sup> Again, turnout was low. Based on available data, the General Zionists won between 30 and 45 percent of the vote and religious parties between 10 and 15 percent. These parties usually formed majority coalitions on *kehillot* boards, often with liberals (who had between 3 and 8 percent of the vote) and other non-socialist groups. The Bund consistently received 14 to 25 percent of the vote and Poalei-Tsion and the OESRP half that, so the socialists could assemble minority blocs sufficient to influence *kehillot* board meetings. Late November elections for delegates to the upcoming Jewish National Congress yielded similar results: the General Zionists won about 60 percent of votes cast, compared to 25 percent for the socialist parties and 12 percent for the religious parties. Congress planning sessions were held through the winter, but conflict with the Bolsheviks led to repeated delays; in spring 1918 the meeting was canceled.

### The Bolsheviks and the Jews

Bolshevik leaders repeatedly denounced antisemitism, but the rank-and-file exploited association of Jews with *burzhui*. During the Constituent Assembly campaign local Bolsheviks

in several cities warned workers not to vote for opposition socialists as they all were Jewish *burzhui*. Soldiers and Red Guards who broke up opposition meetings often abused socialists as ‘*zhidy*’ (‘Yids’) and threatened pogroms. Popular violence also became commonplace: in late 1917 and 1918 shortages and political turmoil fed popular hostility toward Jews that exploded into dozens of pogroms in Soviet territory. Local anti-Bolshevik rebellions could spark pogroms in which crowds attacked Jews as alleged Communist allies; when Red Army soldiers crushed these rebellions, they frequently attacked Jews as bourgeois enemies of Soviet power.

Depiction of Soviet rule as a Jewish dictatorship resonated strongly in popular political culture, reinforced by the prominence of Jews in the Bolshevik leadership and in Lenin’s new government. In fact, the Bolsheviks were Russia’s ‘least Jewish’ socialist party: in 1917, Jews accounted for less than 5 percent of party members. Jewish Bolsheviks distanced themselves from Jewish affairs, which had low priority for the early Soviet government. Lenin’s nationalities policy promised self-determination and minority rights, but Stalin’s Nationalities Commissariat only reluctantly conceded to form a ‘temporary’ Commissariat of Jewish Affairs (Evkom) in January 1918. Moreover, the paucity of interested Jewish communists left the task of staffing that agency to members of the left Jewish socialist parties, who formulated the Soviet state’s early Jewish policies.

In 1918, Ukraine’s declaration of independence, and then German occupation of Belorussian and Ukrainian territory under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, cut most Jews in the former Russian Empire off from Soviet rule. In early 1918 the Soviet government set the framework for repressing religious institutions (the January 1918 government decree on separation of church and state, for example, prohibited all religious education, but was seldom enforced until 1919). But for several months it did little to interfere with Jewish relief agencies and other non-party Jewish institutions. It also took no steps against Jewish cultural organizations, which flourished in 1918. The Communist Party did not elaborate its own Jewish policy until mid-1918 and did not institutionalize the party’s Jewish Section (Evseksiia) until that fall. Local work in local soviet Evkoms and Jewish sections of local soviet education departments often was left to members of left factions in Poalei-Tsion, the Bund, and OESRP.

For Bolshevik leaders, Jews were an overwhelmingly petty-bourgeois element that had to be productivized to fit into Soviet society. As manufacturing and trade networks broke down, the majority of Jews became unemployed; impoverished Jews turned to petty trade and black marketeering to survive, shrinking the Jewish working class and reifying Bolshevik stereotypes. Lenin’s government, though, provided Jews with new opportunities for work in the Soviet administrative structure. Thousands of literate Jews entered the bureaucracy, both at the center and in the provinces. Jews also were over-represented in the secret police (Cheka), a fact that reinforced popular equation of Jews with Communists.

As the civil war intensified in summer 1918, Lenin's government moved against the opposition socialists, including the Jewish parties. It also began forcing independent Jewish public agencies to work under the umbrella of the Evkom-controlled Jewish United Committee. In summer 1918 the Evkom allowed convocation of an All-Russian Congress of Jewish Communities, held in Moscow and representing thirty-nine Russian *kehillot*. Its composition reflected results of the fall *kehillot* elections: a non-socialist majority dominated by the General Zionists, and a socialist minority dominated by the Bund. The meeting formed a Central Council of Russian Jewish Communities (TsVAAD), based in Petrograd, which provided aid to local *kehillot*.

From summer 1918, Jewish communal institutions faced increased pressure from the Soviet state. The new, habitually under-staffed Evseksiia, tasked with transforming Jews into pro-Communist proletarians, spearheaded assaults on independent public agencies, Hebrew cultural institutions, and opposition political parties. In many locales, it demanded that Bund and Poalei-Tsion members be purged from Soviet agencies. In October a conference of Evkom and Evseksiia leaders proposed campaigns against clericism and the *kehillot*. In late 1918 and 1919, local Evkom and Evseksiia departments dissolved Jewish public agencies, seized the property from and disbanded *kehillot*, persecuted clergy, closed religious schools, repressed Jewish newspapers, and shut down Hebrew publishing houses. In June 1919 the Soviet government formally disbanded TsVAAD and dissolved all *kehillot* (although in some locales they continued functioning through the end of the Civil War). Evseksiia activists also pressed the Soviet government, which had tolerated Zionist activity, to define Zionism as counter-revolutionary bourgeois nationalist chauvinism. In September 1919, Petrograd's Cheka arrested the General Zionist central committee. While it released the Zionist leaders after brief detention (as was the case with delegates arrested at an April 1920 Zionist conference in Moscow), the Cheka's actions foreshadowed later repression against Zionists, the clergy, and Hebraists. In late 1919 the Soviet government banned Tarbut societies, outlawed Hebrew schools, and seized all Hebrew press facilities.

By comparison, in locales controlled by anti-Bolshevik forces in 1918–1919, such as Rostov, Jewish liberal and Zionist organizations and Jewish communal and cultural institutions faced relatively little interference from the White governments. Still, antisemitism among the White forces erupted into mass violence wherever they came into battle with the Red Army, particularly in Ukraine.

### Jewish Autonomy in Ukraine

Unlike Russia's Provisional Governments, the Ukrainian Rada created in July 1917 embraced Jewish extraterritorial autonomy. Jews accounted for 10 percent of Ukraine's

population (20 percent in cities), and Jewish socialists constituted the largest ethnic minority contingent in Rada. The Rada majority looked to Jews as allies and created a vice-secretariat for Jewish affairs within its General Secretariat. This office became the focus of heated conflict between the socialists and General Zionists, and the latter boycotted the secretariat's National Council. Both sides, though, considered Ukraine's inclusion in a federated Russian republic essential to protecting Jewish civic equality and so resisted the drift toward Ukrainian independence. The Rada partially allayed these concerns in November, when its Third Universal (which proclaimed a Ukrainian People's Republic) promised to protect national-personal autonomy for Jews, Poles, and Russians.

In December 1917, though, the Soviet invasion of Ukraine unraveled relations between the Ukrainian and Jewish parties. Pogroms accompanied clashes between Soviet and Ukrainian forces. In early January 1918, with Kiev under Bolshevik siege, the Rada moved to declare full independence in its Fourth Universal. The Jewish parties balked: the Bund delegation voted against the declaration and all other Jewish parties abstained. Ukrainian nationalists considered this a betrayal. Although the new Ukrainian government included a Ministry of Jewish Affairs, inter-ethnic relations rapidly deteriorated.

In Ukraine as in Russia, Jewish communities held elections for democratized *kehillot* and cultural activists opened new schools, publishing houses, and theater and music troupes in the midst of political instability and escalating violence. In April 1918 a German-backed military coup replaced the Rada with the conservative nationalist Hetmanate. When the Hetmanate pledged to abolish minority national autonomy, relations between Jewish communities and the government (and its German and Austrian sponsors) frayed. In summer 1918 the Hetmanate dissolved the Jewish Ministry, but permitted elections for local *kehillot*. The results echoed the fall 1917 elections: turnout was low, the General Zionists won 42 percent of the vote, the socialist parties 40 percent (half of which went to the Bund), and religious parties had 13 percent. *Kehillot* then picked candidates for a Jewish Pre-Parliament, which met in November 1918. When that body's majority decided to send a representative to the Paris peace talks, socialists quit the meeting. Weeks later, as the defeated Central Powers withdrew from Ukraine, General Petliura overthrew the Hetmanate and established the Directory. (In Belorussia, the German withdrawal brought reestablishment of Soviet rule, but only briefly; the Poles invaded and occupied Belorussia from August 1919 to July 1920.)

### Pogroms and Accommodation to Soviet Power

As Ukrainian territory changed hands, nationalist militias and soldiers, pro-German partisans, Red Guards and Red Army soldiers, Polish units, and random armed bands all



launched pogroms against Jews. All governments sought to prevent (or at least contain) this violence, but none had the capacity to control events on the ground. Petliura repeatedly spoke out against pogroms, but his own forces and warlords operating under the Directory's umbrella attacked Jews as parasites, Communists, and enemies of the Ukrainian nation. In 1919, Directory and allied forces killed at least 15,000 Jews. After the Polish Army and the Red Army both invaded Ukraine that January, Poles killed Jews as Communists and parasites, while Red troops terrorized them as enemies of Soviet power. After General Denikin's Volunteer Army invaded Ukraine in June, his soldiers also committed anti-Jewish atrocities, as did assorted unaffiliated armed bands. In 1919 nearly 1000 pogroms occurred in Ukraine, leaving nearly 35,000 dead and four times as many wounded.

Across the former Russian empire, over 2000 pogroms took place between January 1918 and December 1920. As a consequence, approximately 120,000 Jews died, 300,000 children were orphaned, and a half-million people were left homeless. In many communities, Jewish soldiers and youth activists formed self-defense units (often against the opposition of Jewish party leaders) that sometimes prevented or blunted the force of pogrom violence. Despite pogroms by the Red Army, many Jews looked to it as their only protection from violence at the hands of nationalist and White forces. As the number of pogroms rose, thousands of Jewish socialists joined the Red Army.

Left factions in the Jewish socialist parties responded to the White movement and Jewish bloodletting by demanding that their parties endorse 'pro-Soviet' platforms. In 1918–1920, debates over relations with the Bolshevik government led to splits within the major Jewish socialist parties in Belorussia and Ukraine as well as in Russia. Advocates of cooperation with the Bolsheviks formed a number of Jewish Communist Party groups: left Bundists in Belorussia and in Ukraine formed the Kombund (Jewish Communist Workers' Bund) and Komfarband (Communist Alliance); left members of the OESRP formed a United Jewish Communist Party (OEKP); and left Poale-Tsion groups formed the Jewish Communist Party (EKP)-Poale Tsion. Jewish communist groups also forged inter-party alliances: in mid-1919 in Ukraine the Kombund and OEKP merged to form the Jewish Komfarband. From summer 1919 through spring 1920, though, the Russian Communist Party and its Belorussian and Ukrainian counterparts demanded that these Jewish groups disband and that their members join the Communist Party. Some Jewish socialists joined the Communist Party, some rejected this path and remained active in illegal underground cells (as did the Zionists), and some renounced party politics entirely so that they could work as 'non-party elements' in the Soviet administrative apparatus. By late 1919, many cultural activists also had come to terms with the October Revolution. The Evseksiia's aggressive

promotion of Yiddish cultural initiatives brought 'Red Yiddishists' into the Soviet camp, but there also were 'Red Hebraists' who concluded that the Soviet regime could revitalize Jewish culture.

The end of the civil war did not bring an end to popular antisemitism, which the Soviet regime condemned as a form of counter-revolutionary chauvinism. And in the 1920s, as during the civil war, Jews experienced Soviet rule as a hostile force. Tens of thousands became *lishentsy* – people deprived of full citizenship rights – for having engaged in trade, for employing laborers, or for association with the clergy. Jewish petty traders as well as once-wealthy merchants still faced punitive taxes. Parents ran afoul of Soviet law by sending their children to religious schools. While many young people were drawn to the Evseksiia's attempt to build a new Red Jewish culture, most adults found attacks on tradition repugnant. Thousands of young people joined Zionist youth groups like the Pioneers (HeHaluts), which walked a thin line between legal and illegal activity. When possible, Jews appealed to Soviet law and their rights as Soviet citizens to protect their interests as individuals and communities. They also petitioned the Evkom, the Evseksiia, Jewish sections of regional educational departments, and Jewish soviet members to intercede on their behalf with the state (for example, in building new schools), much as they had used *shtadlanin* under the old regime. In the 1920s Soviet Jews grasped at new educational opportunities, flooded out of the shtetls into large cities, and pursued social mobility, frequently at the cost of assimilation and alienation from religious tradition.

### Historiography

Historiography on Jews in the revolution has evolved in parallel with general historiography on 1917. Through the 1960s the field was dominated by émigrés, who used published sources and émigré archives to describe state Jewish policy, Jewish party politics, labor activism, and communal-institutional activity in 1914–1920 with remarkable clarity (e.g., Aronson et al. 1969). Similar sources informed the work of the first generation of university-trained Russian-Jewish historians, who came of age professionally in the 1960s (e.g., Kochan 1972), and a remarkable second generation in the 1970s and early 1980s (e.g., Frankel 1981; Gitelman 1972). In the 1980s and early 1990s, greater emphasis on social history and expanded access to Russian archival sources influenced important revisionist studies of Tsarist Jewish policy and pogroms (e.g., Klier and Lambrozo 1992; Löwe 1993), the pre-war Jewish labor movement (e.g., Weinberg 1993), and wartime Jewish relief agencies (e.g., Zipperstein 1988). In Russia and Ukraine, the end of Communist rule made possible the publication of work on Jewish history in the revolutionary period (e.g., Beizer 1992).

Since the early 1990s, historians with freer access to archives have transformed our understanding of pre-war Jewish society (Freeze 2002; Klier 2011; Nathans 2002; Veidlinger 2009; Weinberg 2013) and Jews' experience in the Great War (e.g., Gatrell 1999; Lohr 2001; Prusin 2005). Recent research on 1917–1920 has included important work on nationalist and cultural movements (e.g., Moss 2009; Rabinovich 2014), on Ukrainian-Jewish relations (e.g., Abramson 1999; Penter 2000; von Hagen 2007), on Jews in provincial towns and cities (e.g., Bemporad 2013; Budnitskii 1992; Hickey 1998, 2015; Kaganovich 2013; Pudalov 1993; Sapon 2012; Sloin 2017; Zel'tser 2006), and on antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence (e.g., Buldakov 2010; McGeever 2018). All these topics receive solid treatment in Oleg Budnitskii's impressive monograph on the entire period (Budnitskii 2012). The force with which the Russian Revolution opened social mobility to Jews is emphasized in Yuri Slezkine's ambitious essay on modern Jewish history (Slezkine 2006). While there has been some recent work on political parties during the revolution (e.g., Gelbard 1995), historians have yet to fully exploit archival materials on parties and public organizations, particularly in the provinces. Similarly, while there are some excellent recent studies of Jewish private and family life and gender relations that examine the late Tsarist period (and, to a lesser extent, the early decades of Soviet rule), these topics have not yet received adequate attention for the revolutionary era.

## Notes

- 1 This essay does not consider non-Ashkenazi Jews in the Caucasus and Central Asia.
- 2 This included the empire's Polish, Lithuanian, Belorussian, western Ukrainian, Bessarabian, and Crimean provinces.
- 3 On Lenin's Jewish lineage, see Petrovsky-Shtern 2010.
- 4 Length limitations preclude discussion here of Jews' activity in Russian parties.
- 5 The OESRP platform left the question of Jewish territorial autonomy to be resolved in the future.
- 6 The Bund and Poalei-Tsion took part in the failed attempt to negotiate with the Bolsheviks toward forming an all-socialist coalition government.
- 7 There is some disagreement among historians on whether the British government's Balfour Declaration endorsing a Jewish homeland, published just days before the Bolshevik coup, had any significant impact on support for the Zionists.

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